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State Cold-Shoulders Embassy Request

In recent years our diplomats, as the targets of terrorists, have put their lives on the line. So imagine, if you will, State Department bureaucrats turning down an embassy's request for \$130,000 to beef up its security. And imagine that the embassy in question is the one in Beirut.

When Ambassador Reginald Bartholomew requested this relatively modest sum to help protect his people in Beirut, he got no sympathy from Washington. The bureaucrats reminded him, in effect, that money doesn't grow on trees. They also lectured him about spending funds on security without dotting all the i's.

Finally, the bureaucrats told the ambassador that if he seriously expected to get the money, he would have to promise to follow strict budget procedures, review all the embassy's expenditures and submit a "state of your budget" report.

After Bartholomew does all this, they would think about his request for \$130,000.

State Department officials have refused to discuss the situation with us on grounds of security. But here's what we learned:

From a cable stamped "confidential" obtained by our associate Donald Goldberg, it appears that Beirut asked for the \$130,000 to hire guards and trailers for embassy property outside the fortified compound. A State Department budget officer was sent to look things over.

"While we realize your need for the requested funds," the cable stated, "we want to share with you our appreciation of the situation."

The cable whined about budget conditions in Washington: "Funding is very tight . . . [Security]

has expended its supplemental . . . [Other offices] are already down to emergency reserves in their regular budget."

The cable then adopts an admonitory tone: "It appears that you have expended funds beyond those . . . allotted or available. In addition, we are concerned that funds allotted for security guards have been expended on other projects."

Having established that the embassy was undeserving of sympathy from the people in Washington who are really suffering hardships, the cable laid down "certain steps" that should be taken "to get control of the situation and before we can provide any increased funding."

First, prepare a "state of your budget" report. "Second, you should ensure that no expenditures are made for which funds are not available or obligated . . . Before any obligations can be made an officer must certify that funds are available. This applies to regular post funds as well as special security . . . allotments."

Third, the cable said, "you should review current plans as well as ongoing programs for expenditures of all types to ensure that they are absolutely required (include such categories as overtime, lease of vehicles, etc.)."

The cable offers a glimmer of sympathy. "While we understand the necessity for security and continued embassy operations, the state of the budget is such that expenditures which are not critical may not be made."

But it closes with the bureaucracy firmly in charge: "On receipt of your report, we will review your request for increased funding."